A Basket of Roses

[Copyright, 1893, by the Author.]

"HERE!"

In a tone half spiteful, half triumphant, which spoke volumes.

The speaker was a girl on the verge of womanhood, a brunette, tall, lithe and piquante looking.

As she gave utterance to this expressive monosyllable she set down on the table such a lovely basket of roses that the whole air of the room was at once filled with their fragrance and their beauty.

Near the table, embroidering fleurs de lys on a white satin ground, sat another and a fairer girl, far more regularly beautiful; a Saxon blonde. Nora Treherne had none of the piquancy of the elder and more haughty Lolla.

She raised her eyes from her embroidery and gazed on the roses with pleasure.

"Oh, Lolla, how lovely! Where did you get them? Did one of your numerous admirers send them to you?"

"One of yours, you mean."

"How mine?"

"Look at this note fastened with a silver cord to the handle: 'For Miss Treherne, from Sir Reginald Breton.'"

The tone was still triumphant, even though Nora's fair cheek bleached to a deadly pallor as she heard it.

Reggie Breton sending roses to Lolla!

Envy and jealousy were by no means vices in which Nora habitually indulged, but the one human being she had appropriated for her own was Reggie Breton, and she thought he loved her.

She did not utter a sound, but tried vainly to ply her needle as though she were totally unconcerned. She would not for worlds have Lolla see how troubled she was.

Meanwhile Lolla had opened the note on the exterior of which these words were written, and was perusing it with such delight that she saw naught of what was written on her sister's face.

Having drunk in with avidity every word the letter contained she tossed it to Nora.

"So he has at last asked me to be his wife—tardy, halting lover though he has been. I dare say he will not on that account make a worse husband than other men. Shy men are not my preference, but to be Lady Breton, with five thousand a year, is something to set against shyness."

There was a pause, during which she smelt the roses; at last she turned round.

"What! Not a word of congratulation, Nora? It cannot be possible that you grudge me my happiness. Think, child, too, what a good thing it will be for you. How I can take you out—what presents I can give you."

Then Nora struggled with the voice that was barely at command, and said: "I am glad you should be happy, Lolla, but I do not want to go out more than I do now, or to have any presents from—"

"You nasty, odious little thing! How proud you are. You like to give, not to receive. Well, I'll keep my pretty gifts for those who appreciate them.

"MISS TRENERNE, FROM SIR REGINALD BRETON."

Only I hope you will be civil to Sir Reggie when he comes, and not treat him to any of your disagreeable airs and graces."

"I am going away to-morrow to stay with Aunt Lou, so I am not likely to see him for some time," almost whispered Nora.

"A good thing, too. I shall not have to put up with your endless contradictions, and shall have everything settled by the time you come back. Although Sir Reggie is a good match, I suppose there will be some trouble. Papa is like you, he always makes difficulties were none exist, and as you are his favorite daughter, doubtless he will think you ought to be married first though I am the eldest."

Nora did not answer. She was accustomed to Lolla's outbreaks, which were generally as unjust as they were preposterous.

In this instance, too, poor Nora's heart was too severely wounded for her to have the courage to allude to her pain. Lolla and Nora Treherne were the two daughters of a small country squire of limited income. Their mother had died when the girls were very young, and they had been brought up in a rather haphazard fashion, with nothing but their own instincts to guide them.

Lolla made a friend of everybody, while Nora, erring in a different direction, made no friends at all; that is, she never confided the secrets of her own little inner world.

She was all packed up ready to go to Clifton—where Aunt Lou lived—early on the morrow. Thus, to her intense relief, she would avoid a meeting with her sister's declared lover, whom, in writing her acceptance of her suit, Lolla had begged to come over to luncheon on the following day.

Never before had she felt so thankful when the train that was bearing her from her home glided out of the station; and since she was alone in her compartment she could give vent to a spontaneous burst of tears.

Aunt Lou lived in a pretty house near the Suspension bridge, and there—listening to the old lady's prattle and striving to minister to her constant requirements—Nora strove hard to think that she liked the work she was called upon to do, and was content and at peace. If only she could get off their wedding; if she could go back to her home and find Lolla married and installed as mistress in Sir Reginald's house, she would then be able to face life bravely.

Meanwhile she had a month's reprieve.

Poor little Nora had no combative powers; resigned to her fate, she had left the coast absolutely clear, and when Sir Reggie Breton arrived at the squire's house to luncheon, it was to find Lolla alone in the drawing-room awaiting him, and the basket of roses, still in the zenith of their beauty, placed in a most conspicuous position.

He looked round with a bewildered air as if he did not wholly comprehend the situation; but then he was so shy, what else could he expected?

Lolla was fully aware that he was a man who must be met halfway, or he would retire altogether into the shell within which he usually dwelt—so she gushed. Gushing to Lolla Treherne was not wholly a lost art.

"So good of you to send these lovely roses—they are divine. So like you to remember one's pet flowers and put the sentiments that accompanied them so tenderly and prettily."

"The flowers—ah, yes, the flowers—I have seen them all grow, and Simpson knows how to arrange them," said Sir Reggie, still looking about the room with an uncomfortable hesitation of manner.

"Your sister," he asked, at last, "your sister likes these flowers!"

"My sister thought them lovely. She has gone on a visit to Aunt Lou at Clifton; she went yesterday."

"She saw the flowers and went?"

Lolla nodded her head.

"Ah!" muttered shortly by Sir Reggie, and then a long pause.

Even Lolla was non-plussed and began to think there must be some mistake.

"Oh! I see—yes—she thought—"

What she thought he did not say, perhaps he did not quite know; at all events, he was too shy to express it.

Lolla, however, was not afflicted with diffidence, and, as this big fish was wriggling at the end of her line, she intended to land it, if possible.

"She thought, I suppose," she went on, still laughing a little restrainedly, "that you and I could settle arrangements best without her."

"Exactly. Yet I do not quite see why she should go away. Perhaps it would be better if I came again another day."

"Certainly not. Papa expects you to luncheon, and afterwards you can have a nice long talk with him, and after the talk you can come and sit in the garden with me."

They went into luncheon. The squire was aggressively hospitable in his efforts to set Sir Reggie at his ease, for he was well aware of the baronet's proclivities, which he by no means lessened by his tremendous attempts to—what he called—"draw him out."

Eventually the two men adjourned to the smoking-room, where Lolla had ordered coffee and where she would certainly have made a third but for the important issue that she hoped would be the result of their conversation.

Not that she felt by any means as assured about the future as she had been before Sir Reggie arrived that morning. He was so strange, so undecided, that it would not surprise her if he did not speak to her father at all, and, if he did, what would he say? And Lolla grew white and faint from a sudden pain which this query seemed unexpectedly to have brought her.

Could it be possible, after all, that it was Nora he loved? Had she, the infallible Lolla, made a mistake? She took out the note and read it once more.

No, it was addressed and written to her; there could be no mistake. Yet why was she so anxious to have Nora there? She supposed he wanted the little sister to back him up.

The interview in the smoking-room was a long one, and the farther it was protracted the more anxious Lolla grew.

At last the clock struck four; if she had not feared to be thought unmaidenly she would have gone into the smoking-room and broken up the conclave, so impatient had she become, when she saw her father walking towards the house from a totally opposite direction—and alone.

Where, then, was Sir Reggie? It could not be possible that the proud old squire had refused this good match, because, forsooth, his son-in-law would be richer than himself?

"Has Sir Reggie gone?" she asked, as soon as her father was near enough to hear.

"Yes, I have just unlocked the paddock gate for him. It is a much shorter walk that way."

Lolla could contain herself no longer. "You have not refused your consent to the marriage, papa? You have not locked Sir Reggie out forever?"

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it, child. On the contrary, I have told him that I shall be proud to have him for a son-in-law."

"Then why on earth has he gone away?"

"Why should he stay? He is going to Clifton by the evening train, I believe."

"To Clifton?"

"Well, isn't Nora there?"

"Nora! You mean that Sir Reggie wants to marry Nora?"

There was such a sob in Lolla's voice that her words were barely comprehensible.

The squire looked at her rather comically for a few seconds, then he burst out laughing. His nature was somewhat coarse and brutal.

"By Jove, and you thought Breton wanted to marry you! By the stars, but here is a blessed imbroglio—quite a family drama!" And the squire set up another gruff discordant peal.

"If he wishes to marry Nora, why did he write to me?" asked Lolla, angrily, taking Sir Reggie's letter from her pocket and handing it to her father.

He read it through from end to end, becoming more serious as he did so.

"A manly, straightforward letter; yes, as I said before, I am proud of him. He will make little Nora a good husband."

"Straightforward, you call it, to write to me when he means Nora?"

"It is all your own fault, Lolla, and the less you say about it the better."

"My fault, indeed!"

"Yes, you are always trying to advance yourself and thrust Nora into the shade. It all came out during my talk with Breton."

"I don't in the least know what you mean."

"No, of course not," and the squire sneered. "You quite forget that you told Breton Nora was older than you. It isn't the first time you have tried to play the juvenile in reference to Nora, and like all liars you have got caught in your own trap at last."

Lolla hung her head. She remembered now, how several weeks ago, in a foolish, thoughtless moment, she had made this false statement to Sir Reggie, and she skulked away into the house to hide her confusion and bitter annoyance.

The first piece of petty spite in which she indulged was to empty the basket of its roses and scatter the petals to the four winds of heaven. Then she sat down to contemplate the unpleasant knowledge that Sir Reggie was on his way to Clifton, where, in truth, he arrived that evening, but too late to call at the pretty house opposite the Suspension bridge.

He did the next best, however; he put up at the hotel close by, and then went out for a stroll.

It might, yes, it might just be possible that, the fates being kind, he would meet the fair object of his devotion.

Nor was he destined to be again disappointed; there she was sitting under a tree, reading—dreaming rather, for the deepening shadows rendered the idea of reading rather fallacious.

She started up in a fright when she saw Sir Reggie, and exclaimed:

"You here—tell me, what is it? Is there anything wrong at home?"

"What should be wrong, sweet Nora? Why should I not come to see you? There is nothing wrong but a

"YOU THOUGHT BRETON WANTED TO MARRY YOU."

mistake," he went on, sitting down beside her. "My basket of roses were given to your sister, but they were intended for you."

She managed to control her emotions so as to appear cool and collected.

"I am not Miss Treherne," she said, quietly.

"No—that was the mistake I made—will you forgive it?"

Sir Reggie Breton was too loyal to implicate Lolla, though from his conversation with her father both the men fully understood how the error had come about.

"Forgive it, yes—but do I look so old?"

"No, you look much the younger of the two, only—. But I feel so ashamed of what has happened that it is painful to me to talk of it."

"Then let us talk of something else."

"Of my love for you and your love for me; shall it be so, fair one?"

"If you will," and she looked down with a blush.

Another instant and his arm was round her and he had imprinted an impassioned kiss on the pretty lips. It was fortunate that darkness was creeping up around and that the moon had not yet risen—but in their hearts was light.

A Strength-Giving Drug.

Much has been heard of late of drugs, leaves of plants, etc., with the property of conferring upon mankind the power to withstand fatigue. A pastil which is said to take the place of food and drink was lately tested on a company of Roumanian soldiers who completed a march of seventy-five miles in twenty-seven hours, and whose sole food during that time was in the form of these pastils. First, each man had a pastil every hour, and later on three every hour; at the same time the pastils dissolved in a small quantity of water were supplied to the horses which accompanied the troops. At the conclusion of the march both men and officers declared that they felt no fatigue whatever, and spoke highly of the sustaining powers of the new preparation. The pastils are said to contain a large quantity of caffeine.—Brandon Bucksaw.

The Dog Was Not Touched.

In a parlor car on an eastern train sat a richly-dressed young woman, tenderly holding a very small poodle. "Madam," said the conductor, as he punched her ticket, "I am very sorry, but you can't have your dog in this car. It's against the rules." "I shall hold him in my lap all the way," she replied, "and he will disturb no one." "That makes no difference," said the conductor; "I couldn't allow my own dog here. Dogs must ride in the baggage car. I'll fasten him all right for you—" "Don't you touch my dog, sir!" said the young woman, excitedly; "I will trust him to no one!" and with indignant tread she marched to the baggage car, tied her dog and returned. About fifty miles further on, when the conductor came along she asked him: "Will you tell me if my dog is all right?" "I am very sorry," said the conductor, politely, "but you tied him to a trunk, and he was thrown off with it at the last station."—Chicago News.

Sufficient.

Stephen A. Douglas on one occasion was able to give utterance to a historical retort.

After some one had been abusing him in the senate by the most severe personal denunciation Douglas arose in his seat and said:

"What no gentleman should say no gentleman need answer."—Youth's Companion.

No Wonder It Broke.

"Do you really believe that she died of a broken heart after the divorce was granted?"

"I honestly do. You see, he failed a short time after and could pay no more alimony."—Indianapolis Journal.

Quite Apparent.

Old Schoolar—They did things differently in the father of our country's time.

Young American—But our country's got a step farther since then.—N. Y. Herald.

THAT NEXT ROOM TENANT.

[Copyright, 1893, by the Author.]

IT WAS the veriest old bachelor that ever wore shoe-leather, was Mr. George Barnet—eccentric, precise, and—oh, so proper! Why, bless you, he wouldn't have taken Mrs. Jones' room at all if she had been youngish and the least good-looking. The first thing he asked her was if she took in ladies. He couldn't dream of taking lodgings there if—

"Oh! dear no, sir," he was promptly assured, with a twinkle of fun in Mrs. Jones' optical organ. "I never take no ladies; they're too troublesome. Mine is only for gentlemen."

On which Mr. Barnet permitted himself to be shown the front parlor and the first-floor back room, let with it for a bedroom. Mrs. Jones marched in, throwing back the coverlet to show that the bedding was spotlessly clean; but her invitation to "Step in, sir, and see for yourself," had the reverse effect, for the old gentleman, who had peeped timidly in, backed out blushing and stammering: "Thank you, ma'am—er—yes, yes; I see, thank you; it's quite nice."

That trying ordeal got through, he faced round on two doors clearly belonging to two front rooms and inquired what they were and who lodged there. Mrs. Jones answered:

"This door, sir, next here, is a sitting-room, and that is the slip-room (a bedroom). A young man has them two rooms—a most quiet-be'aved, respectable young man he is, sir."

"Ah—h'm. I hope so, ma'am, I hope so. I could not remain where my very next neighbor was irregularly conducted, you know."

"Oh, no, sir; but that ain't Mr. Welby. He don't interfere with nobody!"

The old bachelor took the apartments. Before long, being of course ten times more curious than any woman, he soon managed to encounter his next-room neighbor in the passage. He was a dashing-looking young fellow, who stood aside for the old gentleman with a polite "Good morning," —and then ran lightly upstairs.

"By Jove! what a queer old party it is, Mrs. Jones," said he that evening. "Looks to a T the awful piece of propriety you said. Ha! ha!—you didn't tell him what I am?"

"Law, sir—no! He'd fly out of his skin, let alone the house. How are you getting on, sir?" asked the landlady.

"Oh, first-rate, Mrs. Jones. I shall soon have all perfected and I think the entertainment will be a success."

Mr. Barnet was appallingly regular in all he did; the routine of one day was, with the rarest variation, the routine of every day. He was the most to-be-pitied creature—a bachelor of moderate means and no occupation.

For a whole fortnight Mr. Barnet busied himself trying to find what that next-room tenant did for his living. By dint of a score of devices known to the curious, he discovered that young Welby came in and out at all hours. As all was comparatively quiet in the front room in the evening he fondly took it that the tenant thereof not only "came home to tea," but stayed at home studying till an early bed-time.

"Really, a most properly-conducted young man," said Mr. Barnet to himself one evening at about the end of a fortnight.

Alas for his premature approval; only two evenings later it was somewhat disturbed. He heard young Welby come in alone; but instead of there being only slight movements overhead there was something of a commotion. The table and chairs were moved about. Then the lodger himself walked about noisily and the deep mutterings of his voice penetrated to the puzzled listener below. Good gracious! was he talking to himself, to Mrs. Jones or to whom? Was it possible that any other than Mrs. Jo—No, no; the thought was too awful. It quite took Mr. Barnet's breath. Besides, he would have heard the most fairy-like footstep or rustle of feminine garments, as his door was ajar. It always was, by the by. Why, there was young Welby going out. Yes, the door shut; and what was more, it hadn't opened again to that young man at ten o'clock.

This was really looking serious, and Mr. Barnet pursed his respectable lips as he slowly retired to his dormitory—quite a quarter of an hour late.

"I shall just lie awake and watch," muttered the old gentleman as he got into bed, which was next the thin partition wall. "If that young scamp is going to—ahem—keep all sorts of improper hours—really, anything might happen next, and my character be compromised!"

But Morpheus was not to be so easily eluded, and Mr. Barnet dozed for a solid half hour. He was awakened by a burst of laughter from the sitting-room next his apartment. Mr. Barnet sat up, rubbing his eyes, utterly indignant at such nocturnal orgies. He had indeed actually raised his hand to give an angry knock at the wall, when a sound broke on his ear which made the remaining hairs on his respectable old head stand on end with horror.

A silvery feminine laugh and voice from that next room!

There was no mistake about it; no disordered nightmare or half-waking fancy in the matter. A giddy laugh and a pretty voice, that said smartly and very distinctly:

"My dear fellow, of course I know you are dead gone on my little self, but

"Oh, my, for shame!
What will your wife say—
What will your wife say?"

This adaptation of an out-of-date music-hall song was sung, and Mr. Barnet fell back on the pillows gasping for breath.

Then came Welby's stifled laugh again and his voice delightedly.

"That's fine, Dottie, my love! What a boom we shall make of the affair at this rate! We'll chew up now, though. I'm tired."

So the selfish scamp didn't even think that his wicked companion might be tired too. Was he going to let her out—see her home?

But in vain the scandalised old gentleman listened for any such indications. All he heard was the sound of a box-lid being shut down. Stipulating out of bed to the door, which he softly opened an inch so as to peep, he saw Welby pass quietly out into his very small bedroom and in three minutes he could be heard snoring.

Then that creature in the sitting-room would slip out of the house presently!

"Good Heavens! What a shameful scandal the whole thing is!" gasped poor Mr. Barnet, creeping back to bed. What could he do but speak to Mrs. Jones? And yet, how could he frame words to even allude to such audacious impropriety?

Tap-tap-tap!

"It's ten o'clock, sir," came Mrs. Jones' resonant tones outside the door.

"Eh—ah—no—dear me—yes, I'll be down soon, ma'am," cried Mr. Barnet, starting up in alarm.

Mrs. Jones retreated, giggling, but she looked as solemn as a judge when, later, Mr. Barnet sent for her, and with much stammering got out that she was quite mistaken about his next room neighbor's character. Nothing less than the evidence of his own senses would make him say so, but he had heard last night, "near midnight, ma'am, a girl's voice—yes, it was a music hall girl, Mrs. Jones;" and then the old gentleman told her what he had heard, to his utter scandalization.

Mrs. Jones couldn't believe but Mr. Barnet was mistaken. Mr. Welby was certainly not married, and couldn't be guilty of such improper conduct as having in a lady visitor so late.

"I heard it ma'am, I tell you!" cried Mr. Barnet. "Dottie was her name. Good Heavens! What is that scamp's occupation?"

"Why, sir, he's an entertainer, then—that's all, and must have been re'earsing over by himself for his new entertainment." She was smiling.

"Good gracious! a play-actor, you mean?" cried the horrified lodger. "That's it, then. By himself, indeed, Mrs. Jones! I heard the woman's very voice and words. It's a scandal, ma'am, and I won't stop."

"Well, sir, I'll just be on the watch to-night on the top landing, and if you hear anything again, step out and call up to me, and we'll see for ourselves," said Mrs. Jones.

To this Mr. Barnet agreed, and Mrs. Jones retired—but up to the first floor lodger's room. If worthy Mr. B. had listened he might have heard peal upon peal of stifled laughter.

* * * * * * *

"Mrs. J-on-es! Come—he-re—quick!"

Time, near midnight; the sound, a hard, shocked whisper up those upper stairs. Down came Mrs. Jones to Mr. Barnet, who, also dressed, stood at his door, trembling, scarlet, but triumphant.

"Now, ma'am, will you still believe I was dreaming? Listen yourself at that r-reprobate's door."

"Ha! ha! my dear boy," came the silvery tones of "Dottie" from within.

"I AM THE LEADING LADY."

"I'm such a nice little sweetheart, eh? But I must play lead, you know—never mind the wife. Ta-ra-ra—"

[Welby.] "Bother her—she can't act."

[Dottie, repeating after a slight pause and from the other end of the room.] "Bother her—she can act."

"There, ma'am," whispered Mr. Barnet; "what do you say now?"

"That we'll see with our own eyes, sir. Hush! he won't hear the door."

She softly opened it wide enough for them to peep in—she over Mr. Barnet's shoulder, perhaps to conceal her face.

Mr. Barnet nearly stiffened where he stood. His worst fears were confirmed.

Welby stood backing the door. The table and chairs were pushed aside, and to and fro the other end of the space was gliding the prettiest, tiniest lady, scarcely four feet high, and richly dressed. She turned slowly each time, waved her tiny hand, said: "I am the leading lady," and glided across, turning again in the same way. It was too much for Mr. Barnet's propriety and morals.

"You barefaced, audacious scamp!" the old bachelor cried, bursting right in, in a blaze of indignation. "How dare you, sir, bring into a decent house such a shameless—"

"Whew!" said Mr. Welby, swinging round with dancing eyes and low bow, "as—the fair Miss Dottie, leading lady of Welby's Troupe of Automatic Phonographic Marionettes!"

Tableau! and collapse of Mr. George Barnet.

Trusted Too Much.

It was with no inconsiderable degree of dejection that the prisoner at the bar received a rigorous sentence for stealing a roasted chicken. He had an artificial brown complexion, relieved by short but copious whiskers. He sighed and looked very sad. "May I say a few words?" he faltered, turning an appealing glance toward the court. "You may." The prisoner cleared his throat. "I wish," he said, solemnly, "to warn my fellow men not to trust too implicitly in the promises of religion. I—" (He must certainly have noticed the stir among the spectators, but he did not pause.) —"was assured by people whose words I revered that heaven helps him who helps himself. I helped myself and look—" But the strong arm of the law interfered and he was hurried away.—Detroit Tribune.

Saved by His Head.

A negro miner at Knob Noster, Mo., fell eighty-four feet down a shaft, striking on his head. The force of the concussion broke his shoulder, but his head sustained only a scalp wound.

A Spanish student, going out with a party to shoot rabbits, was told not to talk, lest he should frighten the rabbits. When the timid creatures appeared, he uttered an exclamation in Latin, which frightened them away, and, upon his companions blaming him he said: "Who could have supposed that rabbits understand Latin?"